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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4877
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6573
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5522
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 2062
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 0303
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 1254
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 3806
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0737
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 2142
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 0977
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0253
RUEHMI/USOFFICE FRC FT LAUDERDALE PRIORITY 3212
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0754
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001628

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: WE LOVE CHAVEZ! WE WANT WATER!

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Classified By: Robert Downes, Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(b).

Summary

11. (C) A peasant protest over a water shortage in the rural countryside outside of Caracas blocked a highway Polcouns and Poloff were traveling to attend an appointment on June 2. The angry residents of Portachuelo in Miranda State blocked the road for hours to draw attention to their plight of a week without water. Municipal officials and state police attempted to negotiate but the demonstrators insisted that Governor Diosdado Cabello come personally to resolve their problems. Poloffs left before the blockade was lifted and the situation resolved. Demonstrators, mostly poor women and children, chanted "We want water!" but some added, "We love Chavez!" suggesting either the people were genuinely seeking satisfaction within the revolutionary process or that legitimate demonstrators do not want to be labeled as seditious coup-mongers simply for pointing out that they have no water. End Summary.

12. (C) Polcouns and Poloff were headed to visit retired Cardinal Castillo Lara in the rural village of Guiripa two hours outside of Caracas when they encountered a long line of cars stopped on the small highway. Vehicle occupants were out of their cars and finding shade from the hot sun. Poloff walked two kilometers to find the source of the congestion, a small demonstration of about 60 poor people, the majority women and children, in the small town of Portachuelo. The group chanted "We want water!" repeatedly and held up hand-lettered signs with the same slogan. Police officials told poloff (who did not identify himself as an Embassy official) the townspeople had blocked the road four hours earlier to protest the lack of water in the town of about 5,000 families. One police officer told poloff the dozen or so state and municipal police on the scene would do nothing to clear the road forcibly without direct orders from

Governor Diosdado Cabello. The officer added that he thought it unlikely the governor would make an appearance, but that an engineer from the state rural public works office was being fetched by motorcycle from the state capital.

13. (C) Poloff observed two female demonstration leaders angrily recounting to a state official the long and troubled history of the small town named Portachuelo. For 17 years, they said, the town has been scarce of both potable and non-potable water. The town is fed by springs from the surrounding hills, an arrangement that works during the raining season but not during the recent dry spell. The municipality, they said, occasionally provided water to cisterns in the town, but only "when they felt like it." The demonstrators said they had complained unsuccessfully to a local planning council in the proper revolutionary format known as "controlaria social" (the Bolivarian version of social auditing). After nearly a week without any water (presumably non-potable as no one appeared to be dying of thirst) and some emerging health problems (not to mention the smell), the residents called for a blockade. One leader said that with all the headaches they had gone through, they thought it only fair that the town receive a treated water system and suggested a new pipeline from a nearby reservoir.

14. (C) One onlooker told Poloff this was not the first time for the town to block the road. A demonstrator wearing a "Comando Maisanta" tee-shirt, indicating possible affiliation with President Chavez' Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) party, said that there was nothing political about the demonstration. "It's just about water," he said. He speculated that the blockade would last until the governor showed up to parley. Curiously, as he returned to the car, Poloff heard the chant, "We want water! We love Chavez!" As Emboffs turned back toward Caracas, police on motorcycles threaded through the line of cars with what looked like the

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rural works engineer hanging on, and no doubt in for a long day of negotiating. By telephone to Poloffs, Cardinal Castillo, a government critic, said he himself had been caught in such highway protests, which he called "fruits of the experience Venezuela is currently undergoing."

Comment

15. (C) Demonstrations like these are commonplace in today's Venezuela, notably among the ostensibly pro-Chavez lower classes. While there are no exact figures, it seems to us that such protests are on the rise. The demonstration was nearly devoid of the ubiquitous red accouterments of a pro-government political rally. The chant "We love Chavez!" we took to have a few meanings. The lower class demonstrators were making clear their beef was with the lack of water (a state and municipal public service), not the Chavez regime. It also may express a belief that Chavez, as maximum leader, is the ultimate recourse for finding satisfaction, expressed in the invocation of his name. Finally, the demonstrators may have been ambivalent about the Chavez government but did not want to be labeled conspirators or coup-mongers, an accusation routinely loosed by the Bolivarian elites against anyone who impugns the Revolution.

BROWNFIELD